A TRIP TO MARS

By Thomas McCusker

HE UTTERED THE ONE GLAD CRY, "MARS, BY JUPITER!" AND MARS IT WAS, WITH JUPITER NOWHERE IN SIGHT
THE VEGETATION WAS RED AND THE INHABITANTS HAD THE SAME REDDISH COMPLEXION

EVERYBODY believed the professor to be crazy; that is, everybody except three people whom I shall name.

They were, first, your humble servant; second, Dodson, the reporter, and lastly, the professor himself.

The professor was a scientist of an advanced type; in fact, he was always ahead of the band wagon.

He, with a great many others, believed the planet Mars to be inhabited; but believing did not satisfy him. He wished to demonstrate the fact beyond a doubt, and as there was no surer way of doing this than by actual visitation, he must visit it.

That being settled, the next thing was how to accomplish the thing.

He had studied the theory of aerial navigation, and had experimented in a general way, but the present means of propulsion were not satisfactory; he must find some new power, something that would, if necessary, defy the laws of gravitation.

During one of our visits to his ranch, Dodson mentioned liquefied air.

Any one having a suspicion of the professor's sanity would have had it confirmed had they seen him then; he danced, he laughed, he cried, and ended up by embracing Dodson, much to the latter's annoyance.

Liquid air was just the thing. He had read of Tripler's method, and had acquired a fair knowledge of the manner of producing the stuff, but before he could put it to practical use it must be improved upon.

So the professor set to work to produce something that would suit his purpose.

He lived three miles out on the Big Sandy, and owned ten acres of indifferent land, which he denominated The Ranch.

Here he had his laboratory, and here he carried on his scientific investigations, to his own satisfaction, if not to that of his neighbors, who let him severely alone, owing to the prevailing opinion that he was a little "nutty."

He made no great effort to dispel his illusion, and was therefore at liberty to conduct his experiments in secrecy, so there was method in his madness after all.

Some weeks later we were informed that his tests had been successful, and that he now had a power which would penetrate space in the face of any and all obstacles, and at a speed that would be simply terrifying.

The next thing in order was to harness this wonderful power and make it subservient to that greatest of all powers, the human brain.

Consequently the profesor set to work to construct what he called an aeromotor, but which the uninitiated would call a balloon.

This was in the form of a huge globe, constructed of wood, closely joined and cemented so as to make it airtight. The exterior was covered with aluminum as an extra precaution against leakage.

The interior was securely braced, to prevent crushing, should the air pressure from the outside become too great during its passage through space.

Through the centre was an iron pipe, or axis, so to speak, which penetrated the globe at the poles, and to which were attached very strong rubber tubes reaching to the car beneath.

The car was conical in shape, and constructed in the same careful manner as the globe. It was attached to the latter by a network of cords, to which were fastened innumerable small pulleys. These acted as ball bearings, and permitted of the globe's free action without in any way interfering with the vertical position of the car, which contained the apparatus for the manufacture of liquid air, the secret of which was jealously guarded by the professor.

There was also a series of pumps for producing hot air.

It is a well-kown fact that the rapid agitation of air under pressure produces heat; this can be demonstrated by the working of a bicycle pump. As the professor put it:

"Hammer air on the head and it becomes hot."

So he reasoned that by a series of pumps working in unison he could produce hot air in any quantity desired; further, that the hot air produced would become the power for operating the pumps.

In the same manner the liquid air produced would become the power for the manufacture thereof. According to this theory, once the machinery was started, the power could never be exhausted; but the practical test was yet to come.

The rubber tubes before mentioned entered the car at the apex, and were attached to what the professor called a condenser, into which both the hot and liquid air were turned, making a vaporous gas whose lifting powers were greater than any substance heretofore known.

From the condenser the gas passed through the tubes into the axis, and thence through valves, which opened under pressure, into the body of the globe, the condenser registering the quantity contained therein.

On four sides of the axis, at each of the poles, corresponding with the four points of the compass, were valves, which were operated by an electric storage battery and keyboard from the car.

The object of these valves was to release the gas therefrom when necessary, thereby giving the aeromotor an increased lifting power, on the same principle that a stream of water ejected under pressure through pipes will propel a boat.

Thus you can readily see that by touching the keyboard the aeromotor could be propelled in any direction, and at any speed desired, providing sufficient force could be utilized for that purpose.

At last the professor was ready to make a test of his discovery, which was to be done under cover of darkness, so as to avoid the prying eyes of his neighbors.

We were invited to participate, but as we were perfectly willing the professor should have all the honors due his great find, we declined with thanks.

The professor did not waste any time in arguing the question. The aeromotor was already tugging at her ropes, so he stepped into the car and asked us to cut her loose.

Gracefully and majestically she rose, and was soon lost to sight in the darkness, while Dodson and I remained on the spot, looking into the "dark void made vacant by her disappearance," and mentally speculating as to what would be the fate of the professor.

Neither of us spoke, for the reason that we hadn't anything to say, and the further reason that in the darkness the solemnity of the occasion was not conducive to speech.

We remained in this attitude for some time, when suddenly, from directly overhead, a light was flashed upon us.

So astonished were we that the professor had to request us a second time to make fast the anchor which he lowered from the car.

When everything was secured he stepped out, observing in the most matter-of-fact way, "She's a peach and works like a charm."

After the exhibition we had just witnessed we did not doubt it.

The magnitude of the invention and the wonderful possibilities within our reach simply awed us, and when the professor said he was now ready to make a flying trip through space, and drop in for a quiet chat with the inhabitants of the various planets, we were not prepared to dispute him. We signified our willingness to accompany him on his next experimental trip, having perfect confidence in his ability to control the machine at will.

A few evenings later another test was made, which proved satisfactory to all and which convinced Dodson and myself that the aeromotor could be handled with as much ease and safety as a vessel on the water; and when the professor proposed that we accompany him in an effort to reach the planet Mars we accepted the invitation without the least hesitancy.

Now I am aware that there are a great many skeptics in this world, and it is possible that some who read this account may have doubts as to its truthfulness, therefore I deem it necessary to say a word regarding the dramatis personae.

Dodson was a reporter on the staff of the Oregonian, so no further proof is necessary as to his veracity.

He was fond of diversion, and when war was declared with Spain he enlisted and went to the Philippines, where he gained some renown by attempting to sit down on the sharp point of a Mauser bullet, playfully tossed at him by an Amigo in ambush.

When the proposition was made to him to accompany the professor on his trip to Mars, he accepted with the remark that if there was any place worse than the Philippines he wanted to get a birdseye view of it.

As for myself, I am connected with one of the great railroad systems of the country, and you know railroad men, and that it is not necessary to cut a cherry tree down to prove their veracity.

It is difficult to say what was the motive that impelled me to go; it may have been with a view of securing business for my company. At any rate, I left my card and a few folders with the inhabitants and the last glimpse I had of them they were admiring a cut of the Sunset Limited.

Everybody knows the professor, so it is unnecessary to speak of him.

Everything was finally arranged for our departure. The car was amply provisioned, and completely stocked with every article which the professor considered necessary for the journey, including a number of cells filled with liquid air—for an emergency, as he explained.

We bade goodby to our families, with the statement that we were going to the gold fields, and might not return for several months, but we took the precaution to leave a complete record of everything pertaining to our trip in the professor's cabin, knowing full well that a protracted absence would create suspicion and result in a search for the cause.

It was midnight when we cut the ropes, and with them the ties that bound us to earth.

Pen cannot depict our emotions as we watched the lights of Oregon disappear, and sailed off into the unexplored ether, perhaps towards "the shores of that unknown land from whose bourne no traveler returneth."

The professor increased the pressure, and the speed became terrific; we could discern this from the rapidity with which we passed through the clouds.

Suddenly he showed signs of great excitement, and following his gaze we made out a dark object rushing at us.

"Unless she obeys me now, we're lost!" he muttered.

There was more pressure—we could feel the car fairly lunge—a sigh of relief—

"Thank God we're safe!"

We had just crossed the track of a mighty meteor, so the professor said. It had the appearance of a flock of geese, but the professor knows.

The altitude began to tell on me; my head ached; my breathing became difficult; I tried to open the door, but found it locked.

The professor asked what I wanted; I replied that I was just going out for a breath of fresh air; he closed the upper ventilators, and opened those in the floor; relief was instantaneous.

I dropped into a state of semi-consciousness, from which it seemed to me I was aroused every few minutes and asked to eat.

I have a dim recollection of wondering why Dodson and the professor spent so much time eating, but have since learned that they ate but twice a day, or at least what they supposed to be a day, as our watches stopped twelve hours after leaving the earth, and positively refused to go again. There was neither light nor darkness, merely a haze or fog, through which our sight could not penetrate.

I cannot say how long we remained in this condition, but we suddenly discovered that there was a violent commotion going all around us. The elements seemed to be at war, and we could hear the most peculiar noises—Dodson said "unearthly noises"—I ever listened to.

The aerometer was tossed about like a kite in a wind storm, and the professor seemed to have lost control of her. The situation was fast becoming alarming, and we insisted that he should touch the keyboard and return to earth. It was rank folly to attempt to force our way through the conditions which surrounded us.

It was with great reluctance that he complied, and we slowly began our descent.

It was some time before we passed out of the storm center, and then we observed that the atmosphere had undergone a complete change.

Instead of the gray fog, a blue haze dazzled our eyes, and had much the same effect as "snow blindness."

Our descent became slower and slower, and it was found necessary to force our way down, as there seemed to be a pressure from beneath.

In due course, we passed into another change, which the professor called "moonlight effect."

The appearance was that of an extremely bright moonlight, with very little warmth, and from this environment there was no alteration.

"Land ho!" shouted Dodson, who for some time had been peering through a pair of field glasses.

The joy of the shipwrecked sailor, when he sights the shore, was nothing as compared to the pleasure we felt at the prospect of setting foot again on mother earth.

As we gradually grew near, I noted that the place had an unfamiliar look. Everything wore a reddish appearance, and I said to Dodson, "We certainly are getting back to 'terra cotta'!"

At this the professor showed some excitement, and, taking the glasses, held them to his eyes for about one minute.

Then he uttered the one glad cry, "Mars, by Jupiter!"

And Mars it was, with Jupiter nowhere in sight.

It was a fact that what we had supposed to be a war of the elements must have been the line of demarcation between the earth and Mars, and when we attempted to return to earth we had crossed the line and descended on Mars.

As we approached nearer we could make out a good sized village near a beautiful lake, whose waters were of an indigo blue and had the appearance of oil.

The vegetation, which should have been green, was red, and the houses, which were of stone and of Turkish design, were of the same hue; even the inhabitants had the same reddish complexion.

They were of superb physique, however, with classic features, and showed a marked degree of civilization.

Great numbers of them gathered together as we approached, and with uplifted hands seemed to be supplicating the Deity.

The anchor was lowered and I opened the door for the purpose of stepping out and making it secure, but in the act stumbled and fell, and much to my surprise seemed to float on the air, gradually sinking to the ground, on which I found it difficult to keep my feet.

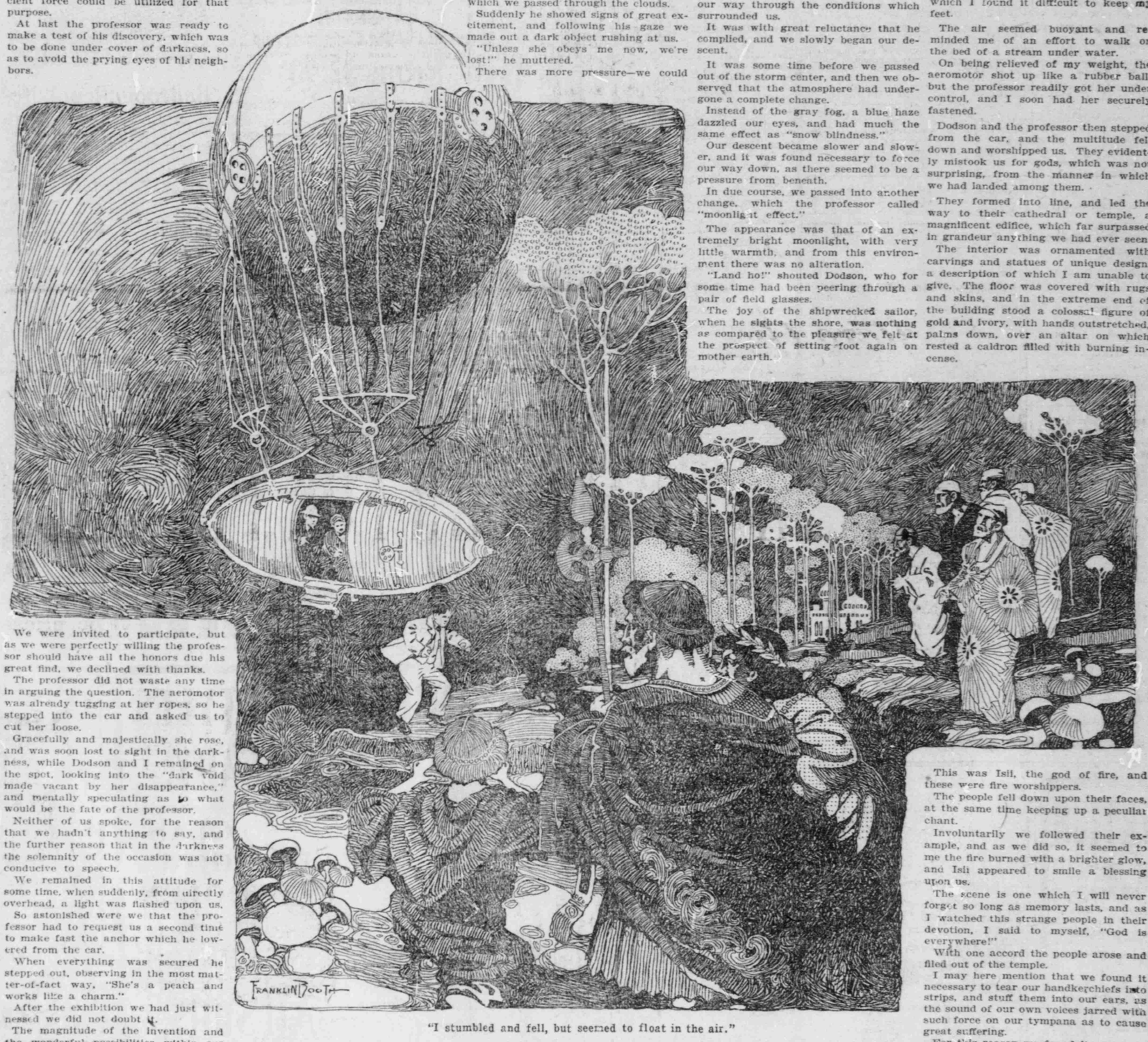
The air seemed buoyant and reminded me of an effort to walk on the bed of a stream under water.

On being relieved of my weight, the aeromotor shot up like a rubber ball, but the professor readily got her under control, and I soon had her securely fastened.

Dodson and the professor then stepped from the car, and the multitude fell down and worshipped us. They evidently mistook us for gods, which was not surprising, from the manner in which we had landed among them.

They formed into line, and led the way to their cathedral or temple, a magnificent edifice, which far surpassed in grandeur anything we had ever seen.

The interior was ornamented with carvings and statues of unique design, a description of which I am unable to give. The floor was covered with rugs and skins, and in the extreme end of the building stood a colossal figure of gold and ivory, with hands outstretched, palms down, over an altar on which rested a caldron filled with burning incense.



"I stumbled and fell, but seemed to float in the air."

This was Isii, the god of fire, and these were fire worshippers.

The people fell down upon their faces, at the same time keeping up a peculiar chant.

Involuntarily we followed their example, and as we did so, it seemed to me the fire burned with a brighter glow, and Isii appeared to smile a blessing upon us.

The scene is one which I will never forget so long as memory lasts, and as I watched this strange people in their devotion, I said to myself, "God is everywhere!"

With one accord the people arose and filed out of the temple.

I may here mention that we found it necessary to tear our handkerchiefs into strips, and stuff them into our ears, as the sound of our own voices jarred with such force on our tympana as to cause great suffering.

For this reason we found it expedient to leave Mars as quickly as possible, and without further investigation of the country or people. The professor announced we would return again, fully equipped for an indefinite stay.

We entered the car, and after waving a farewell to the inhabitants, started on our return journey to the earth.

The trip was devoid of any incident worthy of note, being very similar to the one on which we were "upward bound," if I may so put it.

When we finally disembarked at The Ranch, it was midnight, and we discovered that we had been absent forty-two days and twelve hours.

It has been intimated by some few unbelievers that we didn't take this trip, and that if we did, Mars was not the place at which we landed. The professor, however, says it was, and under the circumstances I am in duty bound to agree with the professor.

EMERSON